

Plantes & Bradford,

illustrating the Provincial towns of England & France.

described Nantes as a town for many reasons.

that much yet remains to be said on the

subject. In the first place, though the Bank Holiday

the early closing movement have in some

give the English clerk, artisan, & labourer

an advantage over his French fellows, in these

the latter are by far the most privileged of the

It is to be expected in a democratic

country, instruction & amusement are

equally distributed, & less distinctly

less observable. Our workmen get

higher wages & more holidays; but alas!

for what avail are these without the opportunity

of more fully employing them?" * * * *

"The French workmen - and they should

not the English do too? - does really

improve the opportunities of instruction

held out to him, & will freely seize upon

intellectual amusement & recreation

if put in his way. * * * *

"If we want to read at a library or study

a certain science, we have to go to London;

but at Nantes, a city of 118,000 odd

inhabitants, we find every opportunity of

instruction the ordinary student may

require."

"The principle of centralization does not exist

to anything like the same extent as with us.

A Winter in Nantes, from A Year in Western France

by Mr. Betham Edwards.

It is a pleasure to meet with a book of travel

which ~~affords~~ ^{affords} insight into the status

of the people & the character of the country the

author

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Author undertakes to describe, & a carefully
written work like that cited above calls for our
gratitude. No doubt the information about
Western France is as reliable as it is pleasantly
given, but, possibly, in the comparison between
French & English towns the latter suffer unduly.
That, because, as a rule, outsiders don't
know much about the internal economy of
our large northern & midland towns. We
know of Manchester & Liverpool as monster
cities, having, each, something like three-quarters
of a million inhabitants, from which
anything may be expected in the way of
advanced institutions & go. ahead progress; here
our knowledge ends, & we take it out with
loose impressions of much bustle & noise
& smoke, of the 'whirr, whirr', of many wheels,
& the 'loud, clattering tide' of much traffic.
Birmingham, the great midland metropolis,
pares a little better in the matter of popular
interest for the sake of its manifold & various
manufactures: but, as a fact, we estimate
our great towns, not for themselves,
but simply as the centres of various industries
& the seats of vast populations which we think
of with pity as housed in their narrow streets.

Yet the student feels that the annals of
the great medieval towns, Bruges or
Mechlin, Florence or Genoa, are heroic, of the
nature of poetry; though there, also, were in their
day but great commercial & manufacturing
centres, densely peopled, even in the fourteenth

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Century when there were fewer people in the world.
Their distinctive industries have passed away;
no longer do forty thousand weavers pour
daily through the streets of Bruges, the armoire
of Genoa span the seasons; delicate
naperies, & velvets, & the fine broadcloths of
ancient Mechlin are, to-day, produced
elsewhere; & yet the interest which ^{attaches to} ~~centres in~~
these cities is not transferred, because it
pertains to the life of the past, to the development
of the people rather than to the utilities they
expected.

The cities of the Hanse, like the forty republics
of northern Italy, were all free towns; no feudal
lordship overshadowed them, no remote
State authority directed their public works.
Therefore each city

developed

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developed according to the mind of its own
people; customs, laws, edifices, all expressed what
may be called the municipal character, the
sense of the community as to what was fitting
for such such purposes & occasions. ~~And~~
~~Therefore~~ ^{hence} every stone of the antique civil buildings
evangelized of tradition as to the old customs;
is full of interest as shewing us what manner
of men these mediæval citizens were.

In the great cities of our day offer any parallel
to those of the Middle Ages in this point of
Autonomy, the self government & self-
development which gives to a great town a
philosophic interest, as being, in its institutions
& edifices, as in its customs, the outcome
of the common mind?

As I glance at the ~~principal~~ ^{of continental} cities of the
States of ~~Europe~~ ^{which belong to} Europe; for the most part
those of the past are richly individual; those
^{where this is denied} of the present display the dreary uniformity,
often splendid enough, which bespeaks
State organization; magnificent streets,
public promenades, municipal buildings,
always for the same purposes & upon one
pattern.

At home, it is otherwise; a British town
presents a sort of countenance, expressive
of the nation & of its denizens. Are
the town hall, the schools, hospitals, libraries,
splendid or mean, in proportion to the wealth
displayed in the private dwellings? The churches,
we do not speak of, for these have usually another
history

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history. Are there well kept public parks? Are
the streets & markets sweet & clean? Do active
institutions provide for the blind or the dumb,
the orphan or widow? When this sort of well-being
obtains, the fact is due to the great liberality of
the town-folk, to that fine quality which we
call 'public spirit', and to the maternal
solicitude & munificence of the State. For our
English towns practically govern themselves,
develop themselves according to their own
needs & ideas; like the great cities of the Netherlands,
they are Free Towns; free States within a free State,
Commonwealths within a Commonwealth,
they do what they will with their own. Their
light subjection to the State does not seem
to them free scope, wider interests & able
protection; while it is less a hindrance or
means of oppression than was the commercial
league which the cities of the Middle Ages
voluntarily entered into.

It would appear that this sort of autonomy
is necessary to the spontaneous growth
of a town; as we have seen, it was the condition
under which the great trading cities of the past
prospered; & the large provincial towns of England
did not grow into power & prominence until
aristocratic domination had ceased with the
decay of the feudal system, & autocracy

expired with the ^{16p6me34} 6
had died out with the last of the royal Inds.
not until Oliver Cromwell had asserted, once for all,
the sovereign pre-eminence of the people.
It is because the two rest upon principles
fundamentally different that we are jealous
of any damaging comparison of the provincial
towns of England with those of France: in the one
case, the institutions, ^{even the} ~~even the~~ ^{even the public amusements,} public edifices, ^{are} to a large extent, provided
by the State; while, in the other, the townfolk
^{continue to} evolve & produce as greater need or higher
aspirations ~~prompt~~ ^{move} them. In this matter
of municipal organization, France has, of late
years, taken a lead which several European
States are ~~even now~~ following; our towns or
modernised cities, more or less after the
pattern of Paris, are appearing everywhere;
even great capitals like Berlin & Vienna
represent the type; but it appears in its
crudest, least attractive ^{form} ~~form in the~~
^{numerous} ~~multitude~~ of new-made towns scattered
over the Russian plains, each with admir-
ably wide, straight streets, lofty buildings
& staff of municipal officials, with everything
in fact, but the population & the industries
which should effect the aggregation known
as a 'town.' It is to be observed that
in the towns of this new style are usually
the work, not of a township, but of the State.
& in effect it matters very little whether
the powers for such 'central organization' be
in the hands of a republican or a monarchical
government; the specific influence upon
local activity & emulation remains ^{in both cases} the same.

We are inclined, therefore, to cherish the principle of local organization, & to look upon the growth from English towns as a healthy outcome of national life. But a grave question presents itself. Is it a fact that the inhabitants of a French town are, on the whole, better off than those of an English town of equal standing? Miss Edwards appears to think so, & her opinion of a typical French city is plainly the result of careful & judicious observation: she points out several particulars in which she considers the habitants to be more favourably placed than are the dwellers in similar provincial towns in England. Let us take an English town which offers a fair parallel to Nantes & examine how it stands in these particulars.

We select Bradford, chiefly because it has been, of late, a good deal before the public. It is true that Bradford has a population of 180,000 against 118,000 for Nantes; but, France being more agricultural country, the population of its towns is never so excessive as in England. On the other hand, Nantes is a sort of provincial capital, ~~the most important city of Western France~~, whereas Bradford is within ten miles of Leeds, with a population of 209,000, the largest town in Yorkshire; within fifty of Sheffield, which has 284,000 inhabitants, & within about forty of Manchester ~~at Liverpool~~, ^{meaning} therefore, whatever dignity & importance it has arrived at.

is not due to ^{any prestige} ~~its position~~ as the principal town of
a ~~the~~ considerable district. 26p8cm27
Bradford lies in an elbow of the Airedale valley
which is known as Bradford Vale, & is ^{usually} ~~surrounded~~
by ^{rolling} ~~great~~ an amphitheatrical hills, rather, the west
of the town is in the valley, while the suburban
parts & some of the principal streets climb
the slopes of the hills. It is entirely a manufacturing
town, from any over-looking hill side, one
may reckon scores of factory chimneys, &
seen from such a point of view the town
^{usually} ~~generally~~ lies under a heavy smoke cloud,
even in the pleasant, well-built suburbs
the inhabitants commonly keep their windows
sealed as a defence against the all-pervading
smuts. But having said this, we have
said the worst of Bradford; for a manufacturing
town, it is ^{fairly} ~~really~~ attractive & pleasant as
a place of residence. It is seldom that
the fine air of the moors is perceptibly
vitiated by the heavy factory odours, most
of the mills are in parts ^{quarters} of the town but little
frequented, so that the main thoroughfare
are simply streets of good shops; while
Manningham & Huddersfield, the two 'semi-detached'
suburbs the ~~manufacturers~~ ^{merchants}
live in show hand some villas the ~~manufacturers~~
merchants live, are excellently placed,
both as regards effect & the conditions of
health. Manningham especially, which is said
to be like Clifton, has a really fine situation,
Commander

Commanding the ^{thorndony} open valley & the hills on
the further side. It is true there ^{is} a bar
enough; but a hill is a hill, & a green slope
is pleasant to look upon, though it be almost
destitute of trees. Where quarries scar the
sides of the cliff, it is scored by straight
^{lines} of ~~rows~~ of cottages the exact line of the
yawning quarry, you get one of the raw & cold
effects proper to the Yorkshire Moors.

On the whole, the aspect of Bradford is one of
quiet respectability, if not of affluence. It
has the air of a Scotch rather than of an English
town; there is little that is ~~flamboyant~~ of architecture
or architecture in the buildings, the shops, or the
dress, even of the general operatives.

Two circumstances conduce to this propriety
of appearance. In the first place every, every
Cottage, building, every wall, is of fine-grained
smooth-hewn stone, the excellent building
stone which forms the substance of most of
the surrounding hills. As this is a material
which does not lend itself to vagaries with
the readiness of plaster, the dwelling-houses
are neat & substantial; ~~and large enough~~
~~for effect, hand some structures of white, where~~
ornament is used in the public buildings,
it is ~~of a~~ chaste & appropriate in kind.

The Merchants' Warehouses are imposing &
beautiful buildings, very large, very high, &
finely finished, though simple in style as
befits their purpose; they ^{have} ~~give~~ an indescribable
look of substance to the town. The old factories
are black & ugly enough, but some of the newer
mills are really handsome; ~~the S. P. Lister's~~
^{an} ~~one~~ enormous

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manufactory for silk & velvet goods, built
entirely of green stone, & with a continuous
frontage of 1,000 feet, is, perhaps, the finest of
~~containing~~ ^{the} ~~towers~~ ^{turrets} - like turrets which rise
above the rest of the building, add much to the
general effect. We have not space to speak of
the Exchange, Banks, Markets, & other handsome
public buildings; but the Town Hall is interesting
as putting forth a ^{small} claim on the part of Bedford
to be ranked with the ^{most} ~~fine~~ ^{handsome} towns of the Middle Ages.
~~to each of which a business hotel or villa~~
~~with a museum & library is to be given.~~

It is built in the mediæval style, & has
a tall clock-tower with belfry above like that of
the Campanile Vecchio at Florence; more than
that, it has Chimes, - a really fine set; & as
the deep-toned musical bells strike on the
evening air, you may close your eyes
& conceive yourself listening to the carillons
of Bruges, or other divin city of the past.

The capital fruit & flower shops, fish, picture,
chinese, music shops, furnish good things
in every kind of need, ^{provision} & speak fluently &
refinement, but the habits & requirements of
rich people are much the same everywhere.
In all large towns, there are, too, narrow & filthy
lanes where ragged children swarm, &
where there is a prevailing odour of staled
fish; ^{in this respect} Bradford can only claim to be not
worse than other towns in this respect; it
has her full share of wretched alleys.